

## 1

## Moments of Truth

[A warm mid-July evening, clear with high clouds. Sunset, bright oranges and golds. Jack and Jennifer stand on the beach, holding hands. Quiet and still.]

JENNIFER: "What are you thinking?"

JACK: "Right now?"

JENNIFER: "Yeah!"

JACK: "Just how spectacular the sunset is – and about sharing it with you."

JENNIFER: "Me too." [Leans closer to him.]

The omniscient being knows that at the moment Jennifer began to ask "What are you thinking?" Jack was seeing in his imagination Barry Bonds-at-bat in the All-Star Game he had been watching when Jennifer suggested walking to the beach to see the sunset. As he had clicked off the TV, Bonds was just coming to bat with a man on second. Now, as they stood on the beach, Jack was, in his imagination, seeing Bonds as if seen from the pitcher's mound, seeing Bonds tap the front of the plate with his bat, seeing his left elbow rock high in the air as he prepared for the pitch, hearing the crowd roar. The omniscient being knows that Jack's experience was, at that moment, totally absorbed in Bonds's at-bat, knows that Jennifer's question interrupted Jack's Bonds-at-bat experience and brought the sunset and Jennifer into the foreground of Jack's experience.

The omniscient being also knows that at the moment Jennifer began to ask "What are you thinking?" Jennifer was feeling a dryness in her throat and a caving-in sensation in her chest – a worry/guilt/tension about whether someone had told Jack that she had flirted with the sales rep that afternoon. The omniscient being knows that when Jennifer asked "What are you thinking?" her real question was whether Jack knew about her flirting.

Jack did not tell Jennifer about his real chain of inner experiences. Jennifer did not tell Jack about her real chain of inner experiences.

## PRISTINE INNER EXPERIENCE

This little melodrama illustrates that quite a lot happens in Jack's experience in the second it takes Jennifer to ask, "What are you thinking?" Jack's experience changes from innerly seeing Bonds-at-bat to something about the sunset and Jennifer. Let's call Jack's Bonds-at-bat experience his *pristine inner experience*. By *inner experience* I mean directly apprehended ongoing experience, that which directly presents itself "before the footlights of consciousness" (as William James would say) at some particular moment. A thought, a feeling, a tickle, a seeing, a hearing, and so on count as experience by this definition. Seeing a baseball player in your imagination is an experience; seeing the orange-and-gold of a real sunset is an experience. Elsewhere (Hurlburt, 2009; Hurlburt & Schwitzgebel, 2007) I have explained why I refer to this as *inner* experience when it includes things like seeings, hearings, smellings of the outside world, but let's not get distracted by terminology yet. Here suffice it to say that inner experience means directly experienced, apprehended directly before the footlights of consciousness. Sometimes, when there is little room for ambiguity, I will refer to inner experience as simply "experience."

By *pristine* I mean naturally occurring in natural, everyday environments, *not* altered, colored, or shaped by the specific intention to apprehend it (Hurlburt & Akhter, 2006). I use *pristine* in the same sense as we would say a forest is pristine – before the loggers clear-cut, before the Park Service installs the walkways and the signage, before the visitors leave their plastic bags and bottles. Pristine does not necessarily mean "clean" or "tranquil"; much of a pristine forest is mucky, bloody, brutal, and so on. Jack's pristine inner experience at the moment Jennifer's question begins is his innerly seeing Bonds-at-bat. Jennifer's pristine inner experience at that moment is her throat-dryness and chest-pressure, and her worry about whether Jack knows about her flirting.

Jack's reply to Jennifer ("Just how spectacular the sunset is – and about sharing it with you.") is *not* a description of his pristine inner experience; let's say it is about his *reported* «experience». Let's examine Jack's pristine experience first; then we'll return to his reported «experience». For now we need only observe that in the second it takes Jennifer to ask her question, Jack's pristine inner experience disappears, chased away by Jennifer's question and his response to it, and is replaced by his reported «experience».

Bonds-at-bat was, at the moment Jennifer began her question, arguably the most interesting thing in the universe for Jack. At that moment, Jack's pristine experience could have been focused on the orange-and-gold of the sunset (but it wasn't); he could have been focused on the warmth of Jennifer's hand in his (but he wasn't); he could have been remembering Obama's speech at the 2004 convention (but he wasn't); he could have been focusing on the story he had heard about Jennifer with the sales rep (but he wasn't). Out of the millions

of things that Jack could have been experiencing at that moment, Jack created a seeing of Bonds-at-bat.

We mustn't make too much of one moment of Jack's pristine experience. His at-that-moment creation of Bonds-at-bat does not necessarily imply that he prefers baseball to Jennifer. Jack created, say, 200 moments of pristine experience between the clicking off of the TV and the setting of the sun; maybe (as known to the omniscient being) this was the only moment that happened to involve the All-Star Game, and Jack's other 199 moments had been occupied by enjoying the sunset and being with Jennifer. Or maybe he's been thinking about the All-Star Game in nearly every moment, the imaginary seeing of the game alternating with resentment over the interruption. Or maybe this thinking about the All-Star Game was (finally!) a relief that replaced his insecurity over Jennifer's flirtation. The omniscient being knows about the stream of Jack's pristine experiences; we can't know from this one snippet.

But we mustn't make too little of it, either. Jack's pristine experiences are his creations, one momentary experience after the next, created by Jack himself, created for Jack alone, created just how Jack created it at that moment, not tied to or constrained by reality or by anyone else. Seeing Bonds-at-bat is a moment of truth about Jack's by-Jack/for-Jack/how-Jack pristine experience. It embodies Jack's interest at that moment, displays that interest in precisely the way Jack knows how to – and does – display it. This Bonds-at-bat is created by Jack for Jack, just how Jack creates it and understands it. There is no producer, screenwriter, or director standing between Jack and his experience, interpreting Bonds-at-bat for Jack – Jack is his own producer/screenwriter/director of his experience. There is no viewer or critic other than Jack himself – no fellow viewers with whom to compare notes. Even granting that Jack was to think about the All-Star Game, there was no necessity for him to *see* Bonds or to see anything – he could have been *talking* to himself about the All-Star Game (but he wasn't – he was *seeing* it). Even granting that he was seeing Bonds, there was no necessity for Jack to be seeing him from the pitcher's mound, or that the seeing was in motion – it could have been more like a snapshot (but it wasn't); it could have been a silent seeing without crowd noise (but it wasn't); it could have been in black-and-white (but it wasn't). *Everything about this momentary pristine experience is Jack*: created by Jack, created for Jack, created just how Jack creates it, created free of any real-world constraints (although perhaps reflecting some aspects of the real world).

Jack lives his life occupied by a series of these moments of personal truth, pristine experiences well and truly created by, of, and for Jack. These moments of truth are Jack's property, his own private way of apprehending the world of reality and imagination. There is no one telling Jack that it would be better if he saw Bonds-at-bat from the batter's perspective, no one saying "Rewind that – I want to see it again," no one else clicking Jack's experience to a different channel. Jack sees Bonds-at-bat *exactly* Jack's way until Jack's interest takes him elsewhere.

## «EXPERIENCE» IS NOT EXPERIENCE

When Jennifer asks “What are you thinking?” Jack could have described his pristine experience, could have said, “I was imaginarily seeing Barry Bonds at the plate in the All-Star Game, as if I were seeing him from the pitcher’s mound.” But he didn’t. Instead he «described» his «experience» of the spectacular sunset. It may seem that describing Bonds-at-bat and «describing» the spectacular sunset are two very similar occurrences, but nothing could be further from the truth. Jack’s seeing Bonds-at-bat is a moment of pristine experience – something that Jack directly apprehended, something that presented itself directly to Jack, something that appeared directly before the footlights of Jack’s consciousness – and therefore it makes perfect sense to say that Jack could *describe* his Bonds-at-bat *experience*. However, the spectacular sunset was *not* a moment of pristine experience, was not directly before the footlights of Jack’s consciousness, was not directly experienced by Jack in the moment about which Jennifer inquired (he was absorbed in Bonds-at-bat, not the sunset). Therefore, *it is not possible* for Jack to describe his pristine experience of the spectacular sunset – there *was no pristine experience* of the spectacular sunset to be described. Therefore, I have put «describing» and «experience» in angle braces to indicate that “Just how spectacular the sunset is – and about sharing it with you” *appears* to be a description of experience but is in fact not a description and not of experience.

**Q:** That’s not fair. By the time Jennifer gets to the *end* of her question, Jack had a direct experience of the sunset – Jack stopped experiencing Bonds-at-bat and started experiencing the sunset. So both are experiences; the only difference is that one is a second or so after the other.

**A:** It is indeed *possible* that Jennifer’s question caused Jack immediately to experience the sunset. If so, seeing the sunset is not his *pristine* experience – it is his experience *after* Jennifer asks him to inspect his experience. And it is not the experience about which Jennifer presumably inquired – “What are you thinking?” is not a question about what his experience *will* be as he tries to respond to her question. Furthermore, it is possible that Jack’s experience did *not* shift immediately to the sunset but rather involved a series of experience-lets that may be characterized by *Oh! I can’t tell her I’m thinking about the game! I’m still mad to have been forced to leave the game. What does she want me to say?!? Ah yeah! She said let’s go see the sunset. Of course! The sunset!* In that case, the sunset itself might never have been directly experienced.

It is also possible that Jack’s experience *ceases to exist* for the second or so that is required to say “Just how spectacular the sunset is – and about sharing it with you.” Jennifer’s question might have triggered a *mélange* of processes, like those characterized above but also about how much he trusts Jennifer to recognize that this moment may or may not be typical of his other moments, by how he wants to present himself to her, about how Jennifer’s friends might react if she were to tell them he was thinking about baseball, about what

Jennifer's mother might think, about what Jack's friends would say, and so on. However, none of those processes are necessarily *experienced* in that second where Jack is required to say *something* in response to Jill's query. There may well be no direct experience at all in that interval (hold your fire on this point until after Chapter 9).

Thus it is likely that Jack's [I'm thinking about] "just how spectacular the sunset is" is an impure mixture of his real experiences and fabrications, aimed at some impure take on what Jennifer really wants to hear and what he supposes she wants to hear. There is no easy and probably no possible way of sorting through the strands that twist and melt together to contribute to what Jack says.

#### APPREHENDING PRISTINE EXPERIENCE

Jack's pristine experience is Jack for Jack by Jack how Jack. It is pure Jack, an elixir, eau de Jack. Jack's innerly seeing Bonds-at-bat is one drop of pure Jack. Jack's reported «experience» is a mess, an inextricable combination of Jack and not Jack, of Jennifer and the Jennifer of Jack's imagination, of Jennifer's friends and mother (both of reality and of Jack's imagination), of Jack's experience and supposition.

Pristine experience exists only one drop at a time – one momentary experience after another – but there are lots of drops – twenty or thirty a minute, maybe. If the omniscient being revealed a dozen randomly selected drops of Jack's pristine experience between the clicking off of the TV and the setting of the sun, a dozen pure Jack-for-by-how-Jack moments, then we'd have some insight into whether the All-Star Game dominated his experience, whether he was angry, hurt, or neither about Jennifer's flirting. If the omniscient being revealed enough randomly selected moments of truth over a long enough period, we could know with some assurance whether imaginarily re-created seeings dominate Jack's experience; we could know quite a lot about Jack.

With this little melodrama, and with this entire book, I'm trying to deepen our appreciation of Jack by/for/how Jack, of what pristine inner experience is and is not. Here's what the melodrama suggests (it doesn't prove or demonstrate anything – that is the task of the remainder of the book):

- Precisely defining the moment is of fundamental importance. In a second or so, Jack's pristine Bonds-at-bat experience is replaced by an inextricable mess.
- Carefully defining experience is of fundamental importance. Jack's pristine Bonds-at-bat experience is fundamentally different from Jack's spectacular-sunset «experience».
- There is some important technique involved in the apprehending of experience. Jennifer's asking Jack about his experience was not good enough to reveal his pristine experience.

I also observe that Jack's pristine experiences are Jack's alivenesses, Jack's scintillations, Jack's idiosyncratic Jack-y-nesses, Jack before he puts on the mask and filters that hide/distort some, much, most, or all of his pristine experience from external view. At that moment, pure Jack was *interested* in Bonds-at-bat. Of the millions of things he could have been interested in at that moment, he created Bonds-at-bat.

Pristine experience is fundamentally interesting because we know what we're talking about. Jack's Bonds-at-bat is pure Jack. Otherwise, we don't know what we're talking about. When Jack says "Just how spectacular the sunset is," we don't know whether we're talking about Jack, or Jennifer, or Jennifer's friends or mother, or some mush of all of them together.

All we need is an omniscient being to reveal Jack's pristine experience, but as it happens, no omniscient being is forthcoming. Jack for Jack by Jack how Jack remains Jack's private, confidential preserve; if we're interested in it, we'll have to ask Jack to tell us about it.

**Q:** Isn't "asking him about it" just what Jennifer did? Yet you criticized that thoroughly.

**A:** No it isn't. Jennifer did *not* ask Jack about his pristine experience. Instead, she expressed, in a disguised manner, her worry about being caught flirting. She used words that *sounded like* an inquiry about Jack's pristine experience, but were not *in fact* an inquiry about his pristine experience.

Jack and Jennifer engaged (knowingly or otherwise) in a collusion about inner experience: Jennifer used words that seemed to be asking about Jack's inner experience (but weren't really) in the expectation that Jack would respond in a way that seemed to be answering about his inner experience (but wasn't really), so that both could avoid revealing their actual pristine experience.

This book is about the possibility of structuring situations in which Jack (and others) can tell us in pretty darn high fidelity about his pristine experience. This telling will doubtless fall short by the omniscient being's standards, but I'm pretty sure we can learn how to talk about *mostly* Jack for, by, and how Jack. We'll have to develop some skills in doing so, learn to avoid the misrepresentations and disguised interests à la Jennifer, figure out how to develop Jack into being a good describer of his pristine experience, to earn his trust, to teach him what pristine experience is and is not, to separate out pristine experience from other candidates for conversation. And we will have to discover whether such a structuring is worth the effort.

I'm convinced that it is possible to get pretty darn faithful descriptions of pristine experience. I assure you that encountering Jack for/by/how Jack is a fascinating endeavor, fascinating for Jack himself and fascinating for the explorer. I hope to demonstrate that fascination in this book. I hope to demonstrate that describing Jack for/by/how Jack is necessary for a science that concerns itself with persons and/or with experience.

**Q:** Are you claiming that Jack's pristine experience reveals the *essence* of Jack?

**A:** No. There may well be important aspects of Jack that do not figure directly in his pristine experience. Pristine experience is a fascinating view of the true Jack, not necessarily a complete view of the essence of Jack.

### Catch-484

In a *Catch-22*, you have to do *X* before you can do *Y*, but it is impossible to do *Y* before you have done *X*. Webster's example is that you can't publish a book before you have an agent, but it is impossible to get an agent before you have published a book. *Moments of Truth* reflects a second-order Catch-22 (perhaps we should call it a Catch-22<sup>2</sup> or a Catch-484): It is impossible to understand moments before you have understood truth and experience; it is impossible to understand truth before you have understood moments and experience; and it is impossible to understand experience before you have understood moments and truth.

**Q:** It is impossible, ultimately, to access these moments from the outside. Right? Isn't all this an approximation at best?

**A:** Yes, but this book will show how we might increase the fidelity of our approximations.

The way out of a Catch-484 (this applies also to a Catch-22) is to start anywhere, but start small. Start with a little bit of *X* so that then you can understand a little bit of *Y*, so that then you can understand a little bit of *Z*, so that then you can understand a bit more of *X* and then a bit more of *Y*, and so on. It is a screwy (meant literally) approach; each turn of the screw takes you a little deeper, a little more securely, into exactly the same *X*, *Y*, *Z*, *X*, *Y*, *Z*, *X*, *Y*, *Z* place that you started from. There is no progress, except in depth. This approach requires patience because of the appearance of lack of progress and repetitive redundancy. However, that appearance is deceptive: There is indeed progress, but it is downward, into security.

I adopt this approach in this book and beg for patience from the reader. Our Jack/Jennifer melodrama serves as the first turn of the screw. That melodrama was a fiction, meant to soften us up, to whet our appetites for a sustained interest in the facts of inner experience and its exploration. It introduced us to *X* (the importance of precisely defining moments), to *Y* (what is and is not experience), and to *Z* (that some methodological sophistication will be required). Those early turns of any screw are very insecure – it's easy to aim a dismissive argument at the Jack-and-Jennifer melodrama and knock the screw clean out. The deeper into the book you go, however, the harder it will be to dismiss.

Now we leave melodrama behind and aim at the reality of inner experience and its exploration. Here is a second turn of the screw, the whole book in about ten words:

Experience inheres in moments; experience can and should be faithfully apprehended.

That experience inheres in moments is obviously not an original idea. For example, “A lived experience which is not a singular moment in the life of a given person is not a lived experience” (Vermersch, 1997, p. 8). Our aim here is simply to take that common observation seriously.

Moments, experience, and faithful apprehension are the X, Y, and Z of our Catch-484. We will have to elaborate moments before we can grasp experience and before we can faithfully apprehend moments; but we will have to elaborate experience before we can grasp moments and before we can faithfully apprehend experience; but we will have to discern what is meant by faithful apprehension before we can grasp moments and before we can grasp experience. I don’t expect you to accept any of this now, at this early stage.

Here is a third turn of the screw, the whole book in about 50 words:

By “inner experience” I mean thoughts, feelings, sensations – anything that “appears before the footlights of consciousness” at some moment. Inner experience is important, and almost everyone is interested in it. Inner experience can be apprehended with high fidelity, and we should do so.

All this might appear obvious, just a restatement of the Jack/Jennifer melodrama. Good! But I will say this in a preliminary way: The science of psychology in general and consciousness science in particular does not have an adequate appreciation of the importance of moments; it does not have an adequate appreciation of experience; and it does not have an adequate appreciation of faithful apprehension. Those are doubtless fighting words for some readers, but I urge us to postpone the fight until we are more secure about all three concepts. Here, I’m merely sketching the concepts; I’m not trying to support or defend them yet.

Here is the whole book in about 100 words:

By “inner experience” I mean thoughts, feelings, sensations – anything that “appears before the footlights of consciousness.” Inner experience is important, and whereas almost everyone is interested in it, few concern themselves adequately with the necessities of its apprehension: that inner experience inheres only in moments and that accounts of experience must relentlessly separate truth from fiction. Thus, a high-fidelity apprehension of experience must concern itself with moments of truth. Moments of truth are bits of the human condition, objective enough to merit personal and scientific consideration.

**Q:** This last sentence is a powerful statement that is alone worthy of detailed analysis. How can we define “objective” in this context?

**A:** You highlight an inherent frustration of the Catch-484 and the turn-of-the-screw method of its exposition. I do indeed intend to focus on “objective enough,” but we will need some substantial groundwork. I hope you will accept that I owe you that and will repay that debt in Chapter 17.

This book explores an obvious truth: Experience inheres in moments. Nothing could be simpler. Unfortunately, this simple truth is almost always overlooked, blurred, ignored, denied, repudiated in all manner of ways. An obvious truth that is almost always denied deserves exploration.

Thus this book is about experience, about moments, and about apprehending moments of experience; those are the X, Y, and Z of the Catch-484. My intention is gradually to explore those three concepts until their inter-relationships are irretrievably, unalterably secure.

#### MOMENTS

By *moment* I mean a specific point in time, the present time, the experientially naturally occurring shortest unit of time.

Now! The camera flashes, capturing the scene shown in Figure 1.1. What moment is caught there?

- Is the moment *the baseball game*? No. A game is not the experientially naturally shortest unit of time. There are lots of experientially shorter units than a game: an inning, an out, an at-bat, a pitch, a release. A game is the setting for many moments.
- Is the moment *the pitcher sets, checks the runner at first, and delivers the pitch*? No. That’s still too long – that’s at least three experientially naturally occurring moments (the set, the check, and the pitch).
- Is the moment *the pitch*? Well, yes, that seems like a moment.
- Is the moment *the pitcher’s arm moves forward from 57° to 58°*? No, that’s too short. That’s a true *physical* characterization of the pitcher at the instant of the flash, but I don’t have the *experience* of the pitcher’s arm moving forward from 57° to 58°. I experience the man as *pitching*; I don’t experience him as *flinging his arm forward from 57° to 58°*. Furthermore, if you allow *flinging his arm forward from 57° to 58°* as the moment, then *moment* can be indefinitely subdivided: *flinging his arm forward from 57.23° to 57.24°* is also a moment, and so on. There’s nothing experientially natural about that.

**Q:** I think you are vague or ambiguous in your use of the word “experience” here.

**A:** I agree. This vagueness is part of the Catch-484: We have to understand moments before we can understand experience, but we can’t understand

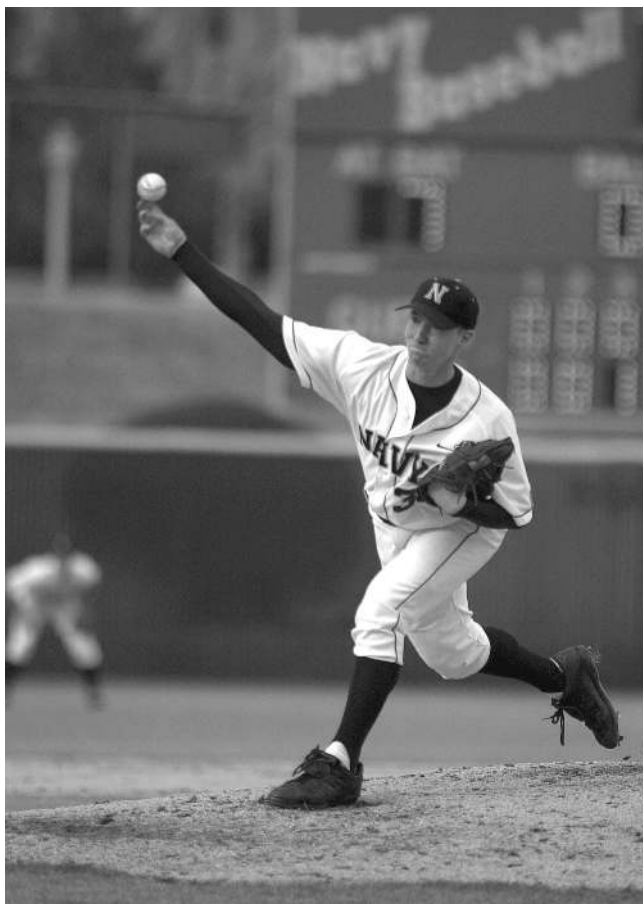


FIGURE 1.1. What moment is caught here?

Photo is by Photographer's Mate 2nd Class Damon J. Moritz. From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Baseball\\_pitch\\_release.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Baseball_pitch_release.jpg)

experience until we have understood moments. This is where I need your patience as we successively approximate everything at each turn of the screw. Here all that is required is a rough approximation of what is experience: We can easily accept that the three hours of a baseball game involves many experiences: of the pitches, of the catches, of the peanut vendor, of the spilled beer, of the woman in the next row, of the recollection of. . . . With that rough approximation of what is experience, we can easily accept that *the game* is too long, too complex, too sequentially diverse to be a moment. *From 57° to 58°* is too elemental to be a moment; *the pitch* seems to be about right as the shortest experientially natural unit of time. You may quibble, but the size of the quibble will be pretty small, I think.